

SPRIT OF THE PRESS.

EDITORIAL OPINIONS OF THE LEADING JOURNALS UPON CURRENT TOPICS—COMPILED EVERY DAY FOR THE EVENING TELEGRAPH.

BOASTING OF BONES.

From the N. Y. Times. The Philadelphians are greatly elated because of the discovery of a deposit of dry bones in the neighborhood of the city. Hitherto the peaceful dispositions of these amiable provincials have been disturbed by the successes of other cities. New York has sadly annoyed the Philadelphians because it has surpassed the Quaker City in population, trade, and political importance.

But now that the General has attained the legitimate summit of his aspirations, it is only natural that his uneasy activity of mind should sting him into occasional outbreaks of eccentricity. As Kibben thought himself a better poet than statesman, and so wasted his leisure in wooing an ingrate Muse, our sanguine soldier is not satisfied with the command of the army, but itches to show the world what a statesman is disguised in his uniform.

There is something fascinating about the General's political utterances. They are so honestly and naively ignorant, so destitute of any connection with known facts, so confident and cock-sure of his own powers and his own sagacity, that they have the same charms as the theoretical campaigns and conspiracies of a loquacious school-girl. Let us soldiers have charge of the matter, says the outspoken chief, "and we will soon settle everything in a satisfactory manner."

It is a strange and significant sign of decrepitude when an old man forgets the lessons of his long years of busy and active life, and reverts by preference to the scenes and associations of early youth. A similar diseased senility appears to attach to political philosophy when it goes back for precedents to the examples afforded by a less advanced stage of society. But though this kind of retrospective wisdom is a pretty sure sign of weakness in political philosophy itself, it is not infrequently a token of rude vigor in the individual mind which indulges in it.

The effect of all this upon the unprejudiced metropolitan mind is twofold. At first we are prompt to perceive the strong resemblance between the Philadelphia of to-day and the Philadelphia of the post-ploocene period. The harmless and truly rural character of the population seems never to have changed. It is true that a considerable aggregate of human beings has been added to the cats and field-mice of a former period, but the essential nature of the average Philadelphian has not been greatly modified. If some species have diminished, others have taken their place. The blustering beetle has vanished, but in his stead the fierce Quaker roams the rectangular streets.

The other reflection which will occur to the cool and impartial reader of the record of these boasted bones may not be of extreme antiquity. The very age assigned to them by the scientific persons is a possible equivocation. Are we not all living in a period subsequent to that known as the ploocene? In this, therefore, really a post-ploocene period? And then, there are not field-mice and cats and beetles still living upon the surface of the earth? We would not for the world dash the delight of the Philadelphians by assuming that their post-ploocene bones are wholly modern; but it is our duty to caution them, lest in their inconsiderate joy they canonize the cat of yesterday and the turkey of last Thanksgiving, under the delusion that they are paying honor to bones of incalculable antiquity.

THE LAST DEMOCRATIC GODSEND.

From the N. Y. Tribune. The most talkative of our generals has been making a little speech in New Orleans, in which he said just what might have been expected of him; that is, that he knew more about the state of the country than anybody; that he had more legislative capacity than the whole of Congress; and that if they would drop their affairs to him, he would restore order and harmony in no time. This is no new theory of the gallant soldier. He has always believed in the government of the sword. He has never affected to conceal his contempt for men who wear black coats, and who paid for their own education. He did noble and glorious work during the war, when the fighting grew bad enough to tame his flightiness and keep him down to his pace, but he never had a political idea which was not absurd and fantastic; and his convention with Johnston, by which he surrendered all the results of his incapacity to appreciate a political principle. Mr. Stanton never rendered the country a greater service than by his prompt and decided repudiation of the surrender, and the vast personal popularity of General Sherman was not enough to protect him from the general condemnation his action received. He outgrew this blunder, serious as it was, because every one recognized his gallantry and his good intentions, and merely smiled at his innocent ignorance of public affairs. During the four years which preceded his resignation of General Grant as President, his distinguished friend and comrade was kept from any glaring indications, partly by the strong influence which his chief's good sense and prudence exerted upon him, and partly by the natural hope and anticipation of succeeding him in command of the army, in case of his promotion to the Presidency. This brilliant prospect helped, at least, to make General Sherman a partisan of Grant, and consequently sound and safe in politics.

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MARSHAL BAZAINE.

From the N. Y. Times. The testimony of the only newspaper correspondent who contrived to remain in Metz during the whole of the siege of that fortress was given to the world some time ago. It will be remembered that it was entirely adverse to the prosecution that Marshal Bazine had acted in good faith, either for the interests of Napoleon III or of France. The correspondent, upon whose views we took occasion to comment at some length when they were first published, was convinced that Bazine did not wish to break through the German lines, and that his policy was shaped purely by considerations of personal profit. His plan, as surmised, was one of "masterly inactivity." As matters stood when he was first cooped up in Metz, something seemed likely to happen which might be turned to his advantage. If, as seemed probable, the Empire fell with the army of MacMahon, Bazine would become the first, or, indeed, the sole, French military authority. As commander of the largest body of trained troops remaining to France, he might make either peace or war, and not improbably in either case become dictator. Nearly all the evidence that has hitherto reached the public eye confirms the belief that Bazine could, if he would, have burst through the toils that only imperfectly surrounded him; and, granting that he had the power, there is no rational way of accounting for his failure to do so, except upon the theory of selfish treachery.

We are not sure how far the statements of the Vicomte de Valcourt, who delivered a public lecture in London, April 17, on this subject, are to be accepted concerning the question. This gentleman was, however, on the staff of Marshal Bazine, and was afterwards Private Secretary to Gambetta. He escaped from Metz, some time after its investment, bearing despatches from his commander. These were written in cypher, and were fastened by "a top-dressing of gutta-serena into a hollow tooth." The Vicomte was twice captured by the enemy and sent back;—his policy being not to take people out of Metz, but to send others in. He declared that he was "a poor American journalist," anxious to return to his own country. The Prussians, however, thought it more important that he should continue to diminish the provisions in the beleaguered town than add to the population of the United States. Now, on these occasions, the Vicomte passed through many parts of the Prussian works, and saw, to his surprise, that they were far less strong than Bazine was continually, at his headquarters, declaring them to be. Before M. de Valcourt made his final escape, news reached Metz of the terrible disasters

that had overtaken the army of MacMahon, and finally of the surrender at Sedan, and the departure of Napoleon III as a prisoner for Germany. The Vicomte asserted in his lecture that, on the arrival of this intelligence, Bazine publicly exclaimed, "Thank God, that imbecile has gone at last!" which certainly has some appearance of an expression of anticipated satisfaction. Besides this, the lecturer corroborated other statements in declaring that the two sorties, of 27th September and 7th October, were almost of necessity failures, and implied that they were designed to be so. Bazine, said the Vicomte, being a man of essentially ambitious character, and thinking he held the army in his hand, hoped to become powerful enough to decide the future of France. The word "traitor" was in fact openly applied to him all over Metz, both before and at the time of the surrender. It will be remembered that when the tidings of the proposed step was first communicated to the garrison, many of the officers resolved not to surrender. A general discouragement, however, succeeded, since none could tell who was fit to be trusted, and the project of holding out was abandoned.

Opinions may differ as to the weight to be attached to the testimony of this fresh witness, and some may deny it on the score of M. de Valcourt's subsequent republican associations. We must recollect, notwithstanding, that it is confirmatory of previous reports, that he was a man before a very large audience in a way that invited no challenge or contradiction, and was given as the first of a series of lectures on similar themes that will afford an opportunity for close scrutiny. It seems, on the whole, but too certain that Bazine proved false to his trust at one of the most trying emergencies in the history of his country, and that the terrible disasters which have since overtaken her are thus, in a measure, to be laid at his door. Unless a better defense can be offered in his behalf than any that has so far appeared, hardly a man has ever carried the baton of a Marshal of France whose name will go down to posterity associated with so dark a stigma.

ARISTOCRACY—THE KNICKERBOCKERS

From the N. Y. Sun. Pride of birth is a natural feeling, in which men of every nationality partake, but in different degrees. A man conscious of having had respectable ancestors has a stronger inclination to do honor to their memory by reputable conduct than the son of nobody or one whose parents have a bad character. But in this country we have, thank God! no aristocracy, or, at least, no order of society that corresponds with the landed aristocracy of England and the continent of Europe. It is true we have a spurious kind of aristocracy, founded on money, whose characteristics are lavish expenditure, extravagance, and tawdry display. But people of culture and refinement laugh at their pretensions. Then we have in some of our large towns, especially Boston and Philadelphia, an aristocracy of talent and education, which is not to be laughed at. But society is not so divided among us, nor are the lines of demarcation so distinct, as to prevent classes of people nominally separated by some social differences from running into one another, so that it is difficult to determine which is on the most elevated social plane. There is also here and there an American family which can boast of an illustrious lineage, but people of this sort are usually indifferent to ancestral distinctions, and never obtain the social position of eminence. Persons of similar tastes, and about the same degree of intelligence and refinement, naturally seek each other's society, and usually without inquiring whether blue blood or the common fluid ran in the veins of their ancestors.

There has been a great pretense of high birth and exclusiveness among the descendants of the Knickerbockers, as the Dutch boers and burghers are called who came from the Old World and settled New Amsterdam. Probably, if they were familiar with the history of their ancestors, and knew their social status in Holland, and the circumstances under which they came to this country, these Knickerbockers would come to a more accurate appreciation of their own claims to aristocratic descent than is now entertained among them. Indeed, the idea has generally obtained that there was a strain of the best blood in many of those who came here from Holland. The truth is altogether otherwise.

The separation of New Netherlands from the mother country took place more than a century earlier than that which took place between the colonies and Great Britain, or about two hundred years ago. Soon after the change of dominion all family intercourse ceased between the two countries. There was, it is true, considerable intercommunication for a few years after the English conquest, but upon the decease of those then living correspondence between the members of the families on the two sides of the Atlantic dropped off, and finally ceased altogether.

The American Dutchmen, therefore, constitute a body totally severed as regards social relations from their brethren in Europe. They may regard Holland with filial, pious love, as the home of their ancestors. They may cherish a pride in the military achievements of the mother country. The commercial enterprises, the prudent thrift, the laws of freedom, all of which distinguished the early days of the Dutch republic, they may appropriate to themselves as a part of their patrimonial inheritance. But this feeling of attachment is not at all reciprocated or understood by the Hollanders. The people there have no relationship with ours. They have no pride in our growth and prosperity. They are generally ignorant of our history, and those who know something of the ancient country of New Netherlands are wholly indifferent in regard to this country. The outrages, lynchings, and general immorality which our newspapers report to their readers are reproduced in the journals of Paris, Brussels, and London, with abusive comments, and thus form the staple of information on the United States to be found in Dutch newspapers.

The simple truth is that the great majority of the Netherlands who settled permanently in America belonged to the so-called lower or laboring classes. They were farmers or mechanics. The most distinguished Knickerbocker families—those whose ancestors filled the most important positions in the new settlement, as well as others—were from the great body of common people. The ancestor of Peter Stuyvesant was a humble clerk in Friesland. The only patron who settled upon his estates on the Hudson was a diamond-outter of Amsterdam. Although the republic of Holland conferred no titles, it protected the old nobility in their estates, and they and their families were content to leave distant enterprises in the hands of the other classes and remain at home. It may be asked, not unreasonably, how men of inferior position and devoid of wealth or influence in Holland could obtain grants of large tracts of land from the Government. The answer is easy and complete. The object

was the settlement of the country. The land had no market value, and minor rights to any extent were conceded to persons of enterprise who could take out settlers in proportion to the amount of territory granted them. Besides, the island of Java offered a more inviting field of adventure, and the younger sons of the gentry sought their fortunes in the East Indies. There were fabulous stories current of the sources of wealth in that remote region, which was represented as a golden Cathay; and the dashing young fellows of Holland were attracted thither, as the enterprise and activity of our day were drawn to the Pacific slope on the discovery of gold in California.

THE "COMMUNE" AS A BASIS OF GOVERNMENT.

From the Pall Mall Gazette. It is a strange and significant sign of decrepitude when an old man forgets the lessons of his long years of busy and active life, and reverts by preference to the scenes and associations of early youth. A similar diseased senility appears to attach to political philosophy when it goes back for precedents to the examples afforded by a less advanced stage of society. But though this kind of retrospective wisdom is a pretty sure sign of weakness in political philosophy itself, it is not infrequently a token of rude vigor in the individual mind which indulges in it. The fashion of mimicking the language and demeanor of classical republics which prevailed in the French democracy of 1793 was ludicrous enough, as ludicrous as the contemporary mode among ladies of dressing, or rather undressing, in classical tunics, and facing a Parisian climate in winter with stockinged feet and very exposed shoulders. But the men who thus modelled themselves after an extinct type were, many of them, neither foolish nor weak. Mistaken as they were in supposing the lessons of antiquity directly applicable to their own day, they could themselves appreciate what was great and what was wise in the recollections of ages gone by, and regulate their own conduct to a certain extent in unison with such guidance. They were utterly mistaken in fancying Sparta and Athens models for France; they were not themselves the worse, but the better, so far as they were in earnest, for acting the parts of Spartans and Athenians.

These reflections are not unreasonably occasioned by the singular anachronism which is now attempted—we cannot say perpetrated—by the extempore government established for the nonce in Paris. Of course, the majority of its leading spirits are simply of the anarchical or destructive character. But there are others among them—men who have formed an idea of a possible State, such as Europe for many generations has not witnessed in actual existence. There have been times and countries in which the cities and their dwellers were almost everything—the mass of mankind who cultivated the earth nothing. Inside the walls, affluence, education, comfort, luxury; outside, a multitude scarcely removed above barbarism, subject to a number of feudal lords who no doubt defied the citizens, and plundered them when they were able, and their own lawless habits and partialism placed in general at the mercy of the burghers whom they affected to despise. Such were the Netherlands at one period; such more especially was Northern Italy. "In every other part of Europe," says Macaulay, "a large and powerful privileged class trampled on the people and defied the Government. But in the most flourishing parts of Italy the nobles were reduced to comparative insignificance. In some districts they took shelter under the protection of the powerful component which they were unable to oppose, and gradually sank into the mass of burghers."

Such is the precedent, if public rumor is correct, which the few thoughtful spirits among the Red rulers of the Hotel de Ville have before their eyes. They dream of a France consisting of a number of confederate cities, exercising in harmony with each other all political power, and a multitude of benighted agriculturists obeying the laws which the cities dictate and paying the taxes which they impose. Such is the theory which Assi, the chief of the International Society, is said to have drawn from the pages of the only book which he admits having studied—M. Quinet's "History of Italy." Whatever may be the deficiencies of Citizen Assi's political education, he is evidently a man who thinks for himself, and who possesses the leader's faculty of expounding his thoughts; and, if it be true that he is already under proscription by the merely anarchical section of the Commune, he has evidently earned the ordinary reward of one who thinks for himself in troublesome times, but has not strength to enforce his thoughts—either neglect or martyrdom. The ideas of such a man are generally more worth investigation than better instructed but more commonplace personages are apt to suppose. Let us put ourselves for a moment in the features of an Italian civic commonwealth of the Middle Ages, and with the guidance of safer authorities than M. Quinet's epigrams.

At the time of its greatest development in the fourteenth century, republican Florence was a city with some ninety or a hundred thousand inhabitants. In theory, its Constitution established a government of trades' unions. There were twenty-one or twenty-three guilds; the greater and lesser "arts"—lawyers, notaries, wholesale dealers, bankers, etc., belonging to the former; retailers, shoemakers, butchers, tailors, and the like to the smaller. Each of these companies had its own council and its own executive. Each excluded the competition of private traders by the most jealously exclusive laws. United, or rather federated, they constituted the commonwealth—with its general executive, composed of members chosen by a constantly changing series of refined contrivances; its two elected legislative councils; and its device for occasionally resorting to a plebiscite, a "resolution" in Hallam's words, "of all derivative powers into the immediate operation of the popular will," when Florence was technically said "for a people," to make itself people—from which "people," however, not only mere proletarians but citizens not enrolled in the trades were excluded.

Such was the general outline of Florentine Government for nearly two centuries, but subject to perpetual variations of detail and interrupted by periods of anarchy and tyranny. Nevertheless, it secured an amount of wealth, comfort, social refinement such as was only approached in the times of which we are speaking in a few other communities similarly circumstanced. The difference between the life of a citizen of Florence, even of the meanest, and that of the vassal of some feudal lord in the neighboring valleys of the Apennines was almost as great as that between a townsman of an Atlantic city in the United States and a slave on the estate of a

planter while slavery existed. And the nobles themselves were gradually drawn within the magic circle of city influence. They were greater men outside the walls, but happier within. At first they honored the Commune by taking a leading part in its affairs; then they were content to play an inferior part; finally, the jealous spirit of democracy so far prevailed as to exclude them from power altogether, and with many circumstances of contempt. In the meantime the vassals of these lords—the tillers of the soil within the Florentine territory—found their position much improved from what it had been under mere feudal dominion. Though absolutely without political rights, the Florentine contadino was protected by the great Commune, improved greatly in physical condition, and attained a sort of rustic independence. But Florence had only about 200,000 country subjects; her dominions were hemmed in by those of other Tuscan towns—Pisa, Arezzo, and the rest; these again forming only a minor cluster in the constellation of Italian cities, which included such mighty States as Venice and Genoa—all reproductions, with many differences, of the type of which Florence furnished the most "advanced" or democratic specimen.

In Italy, therefore, the political dream which is attributed to Assi was to a certain extent realized. But her civic commonwealth was strangely short-lived—all but the two last named, which had a large admixture of the aristocratic element, and it is very noteworthy that their disorganization and fall were not in general the consequence, as might have been expected, of any "ugly rush" from the excluded lower classes or from the rejected nobility. They commonly proceeded from one or the other of two causes. The first was the bitter jealousy entertained in democracies of all who achieve power by mere popular favor—jealousies far more incalculable than those which are excited elsewhere by recognized prerogative; jealousy, which is just as operative and as injurious at Washington now as in the Florence of Dante, though kept in control by greater solidity of institutions and national character. And thus the history of Florence during these two centuries discloses little more than a succession of short reigns of popular favorites, energetic and wealthy citizens, foreign military adventurers, and now and then a plain man of the people, such as Michael Landò, the honest wool-comber, who was chosen "gonfalonier" in a wanton freak, because he happened one day to be carrying the standard of justice, and who governed for a short space more sensibly than any of his distinguished predecessors. For such inevitable dissension there could be no external cure, because it arose from the very nature of democracy acting within a small sphere. The next and equally insuperable cause of failure was to be found in the mutual jealousies of the several neighboring cities. They never could agree for any object of common benefit, although separate leagues could be formed from time to time for the purpose of tearing each other to pieces as Guelphs and Ghibellines. The wheel of change was continually going round; in one city the multitude would rise against a self-imposed chief, and "make themselves people" once more; in another, kind of popular wrangles, men would place themselves more under the foot of a "signore," but, in the long run, the bias towards absolute government was sure to prevail, and one after the other these noble cities fell under despotism and consequent decay.

It may be scarcely worth while, for purposes of political instruction, to draw the picture of a past state of things which no power on earth could reproduce in Europe under the reign of newspapers and standing armies. But something may be learned by observing the innate and incurable defects—incurable because deeply rooted in the propensities of men—which beset the ideal of a country composed of a cluster of civic commonwealths, even were it capable of temporary realization.

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